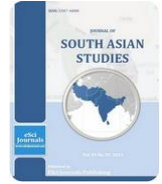




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Book Review

HYDRAULIC CITY: WATER AND THE INFRASTRUCTURES OF CITIZENSHIP IN MUMBAI

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By Nikhil Anand, 2017. *Hydraulic City: Water and the Infrastructures of Citizenship in Mumbai*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017. Pp. 312, ISBN 10: 0822362694, USD \$26.95.

The anthropology of infrastructure has emerged as a vibrant area of inquiry, as recent ethnographies of roads, electricity networks, canals, oil pipelines, and water supply systems have provided a generative means to foreground the built environment—which has hitherto been the urban backstage—in order to reveal the social lives of infrastructures. Nikhil Anand's *Hydraulic City: Water and the Infrastructures of Citizenship* is a fine-grained ethnography that contributes to this body of writing by inviting the social sciences to become much more than human, to make the urban invisible visible, and above all, to consider how states and people mobilize infrastructure. Based on over two years of ethnographic fieldwork, including 18 months of uninterrupted fieldwork from 2007-2008 with urban residents, engineers, social workers, politicians, plumbers and consultants, Anand draws attention to the ways in which the people of Mumbai obtain access to water in the city, and contends that water infrastructures are critical sites in the making of citizenship in Mumbai. The crux of Anand's argument is that hydraulic citizenship, which he defines as "the ability of residents to be recognized by city agencies through legitimate water services," does not adhere to a notion of temporal linearity. Rather, it is an unstable, iterative and reversible process (8).

The earlier chapters of *Hydraulic City* set up the larger problem of why water is such a contested resource in Mumbai. Water does not quite fit the bill of a public good that is fully accessible to every resident; rather, residents deal with differing pressures and volumes and fickle

water access and must navigate both material and social infrastructures to establish water connections. Attending to the enduring British colonial legacy of dividing the city, Anand notes that Mumbai's water system has long been splintered into subcategories: flats vs. settlements, deserving vs. undeserving neighbourhoods. From narratives of scarcity talk that mask the violence behind the consequential act of moving water from places of 'less' consequence to the city centers, to technical explanations of the difficulty of transporting water (distance, elevation, etc.), and xenophobic remarks about the influx of migrants from neighbouring countries, Anand makes a convincing case that water is not a right, but a resource that only certain groups of people can access through careful and creative planning. Hydraulic systems, therefore, produce and manage difference and constitute the material footprints of Mumbai residents' articulation of urban citizenship and belonging.

In a move that nuances Foucauldian studies of governmentality that tend to focus on the ways in which the state surveils its inhabitants by making its subjects visible and legible (Scott 1998), Anand does not over-emphasise the power of the state by narrowing it to a coherent set of rationalities and competencies, and instead tracks the ways in which settlers demand to be seen in order to access water services. The state is theorized as a fragmented entity that operates through an iterative and changing relationship between actors and the social and material networks that they encounter, as opposed to an all-knowing panopticon that can track every move of its subjects "at a distance" (Foucault 1991). Anand does not ignore the various state experts and instruments that govern populations but cautions us not

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to re-inscribe a view of the world that is governed by experts rather than one that is lived by people. The reader is privy to the dialectic system of tension and collaboration between state officials, city dwellers, and their intermediaries (municipal plumbers). Settlers do their best to be counted and documented by state agencies through a blend of activism and political patronage. Meanwhile city officials and councillor-dadas work hard to “ensure that they do *not* issue settlers documents that could later be used as claims of residence, of belonging, and of citizenship” (89). This shows that the state does not wield absolute control over its populace. Despite state visions of order, water infrastructures demonstrate that the distribution of resources cannot be reduced to the domain of technopolitics but must be seen through the lens of lively networks of sociality. Mumbai’s water distribution system illustrates the constantly shifting socio-political and relational infrastructures and networks that govern practices of knowledge brokering. As Anand follows social workers who engage in acts of brokerage between settlers and municipal councillors, we learn that settlers are not disempowered people. Through NGOs, they deploy the language of human rights in attempts to get what they want. Combining both liberal rights discourse with patronage, settlers unsettle the boundaries between political vs. civil society and government vs. non-government.

Further reinforcing the argument that order and rule are not realities that ought to be taken for granted, the penultimate chapter attends to the disruptions that bring to life the dynamic but fragile relationship between the human and material. By exploring the technopolitics of water leakages, Anand argues that leakage is a useful heuristic device that indicates the uncertainties that one faces with water is a result of the accumulation of the technological, material, and sociopolitical that constitute Mumbai’s hydraulic régime. Leaky pipes often confounded engineers not only in the technical challenges that they posed but also through the repercussions they wrought— “errant employees, non-working meters, corroded pipes and exclusive water laws” (187). As such, even water experts had to improvise as best as they could. Such infrastructural disruptions prove to be daunting for both the state and its people—after all, how do you fix

something when you can’t quite tell what is broken? In the same vein, how does one practice the politics of ‘resistance’ when it is hard to even identify exactly what or whom to ‘resist’?

In his concluding remarks on neoliberal reform, Anand seems eager to side-step contemporary debates around the privatization of water. He argues that this debate is not a productive one given that water infrastructures in Mumbai are neither public *nor* private but might be more constructively conceived as an amalgamation of “public-private relations that collects and moves rainwater from agrarian publics in Shahpur to private homes and businesses in the city” (236). Whilst Anand is indeed correct to point out the blurring of boundaries between the public and the private, he risks reducing an analysis of how neoliberalism has shaped water governance to the question of whether water is a public or a private good. Instead, one might want to tend to how market logic has produced unwanted consequences in the city’s hydraulic infrastructures. Here I am thinking of Lisa Björkman’s (2015) complementary ethnography on the water supply in Mumbai that examines how the city’s immersion in neoliberalization precipitated a hydrological crisis. Björkman’s work reveals that the government removed and rehoused the city’s working-class population to free up land for commercial development that would hopefully attract foreign direct investment, thereby throwing the water system into chaos as engineers were forced to increase the supply of water in places that they had not anticipated. It would have been useful for Anand to cite Björkman’s argument on marketization to provide an even richer account of why water remained unavailable to certain subsets of the population even though the city as a whole does not suffer from a lack of water. Ultimately *Hydraulic City* is an important contribution to growing scholarship on infrastructure, materiality, and the non-human. Water infrastructures are not just inert technical instruments upon which humans act but are integral aspects of relationships and subjectivities that generate different meanings and social relations. By infusing the political with the material, Anand asks that we recognize infrastructures are conduits of sociopolitical processes that shape lived realities and delineate areas of concern and action.

